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Good morning and welcome to the eleventh and final public meeting on the Future of American agriculture and rural life.

As most of you know, this three-day session will conclude the first phase of a national dialogue on the structure of agriculture that began with ten public meetings held throughout the country last November and December.

I called those meetings to give farmers and people from all other walks of life an opportunity to say what kind of food and agriculture system we ought to have in the next 10 to 20 years and to tell us what role, if any, public policy ought to play in its development.

Seventy percent of those who witnessed at the regional meetings were farmers who spoke for themselves or for a farm organization. Others represented research or advocacy groups, farm cooperatives, religious organizations, agribusiness, banks, government, labor, consumers, academia and the press.

Copies of the summary of what was said at those meetings are available today in the foyer outside the auditorium. You'll note from the summary that the testimony was as frank as it was wide-ranging, and that the opinions expressed were sharply diverse.

Those first ten meetings deliberately focused on regional problems and successes, but in this session I hope we can switch perspective from the regional to the national and concentrate on the central issues.

I especially want to hear your views about public policies and their effect on farming, on supplying farmers, on marketing farm products, on bringing new farmers into the business, on the health and vigor of rural communities, and on the preservation and use of our natural resources.

I want to make it clear at the outset that I am interested in more than your views on the big numbers, the averages, the total needs, the total supplies and all the other statistics. We are, after all, talking about people--women and men and children with hopes and dreams, with frustrations and disappointments. Policy, after all, has to be made to serve the people, whether those people are growers, or farm workers, or shippers, or research scientists, or urban consumers--rich and poor.

The record of this public meeting will be kept open until May 31 for any additional comments anyone wants to submit. Then the information, recommendations and opinions offered at all eleven meetings--or provided in writing--will be analyzed for plausibility and feasibility.

The plausible and feasible will then be meshed with specific information developed through research conducted by the USDA, farm and rural life organizations, agribusiness and public interest groups, land grant colleges and individual authorities on structure. The findings of the project should help us determine how appropriate and effective the policies behind our programs are today or will be tomorrow.

Our goal is to have any recommendations for changes ready by the time Congress takes up the 1981 farm bill or drafts any major new tax, credit or regulatory legislation.

I might note in closing that while the structure project is a non-partisan effort, it is political in the classic Greek sense of the word. To the ancient Greeks, politics had everything to do with the way they related to each other as citizens, with the way they raised their children, with the way they upheld their values as a people.

So as we meet here to discuss the factors--including public policy--that will influence the organization, the control and the direction of American agriculture for the next several decades, we might keep in mind something that was said by one of the first witnesses at the regional meetings.

"As we consider the structure of our agriculture," he said, "remember that we are dealing with the shape of our democracy."

That we are.

Now let's begin.